



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 3 March 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th March 2015: Pocharam. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Pocharam is a large reservoir on the Manjira River, about 70km downstream from Manjira Barrage. The reservoir is situated amidst undulating hills, with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. The lake is known to support a wide variety of resident, as well as migratory waterfowl. More than 53 species of waterfowl are listed for the area. Specialities include Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Bar-headed Goose.

Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

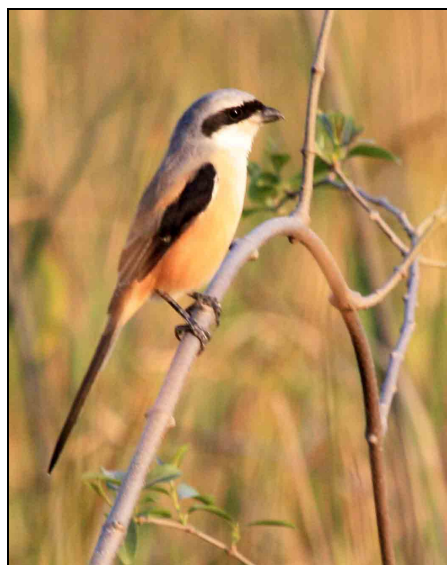
INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Ashwin Naidu on "Community-based conservation of the endangered fishing cats and their mangrove habitat in A.P."

Tuesday, 3rd March 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Mr. Ashwin Naidu is an NRI based at University of Arizona, USA and is involved with research on the Fishing Cat, which is listed in IUCN's endangered list. He is the co-founder of "Fishing Cat Conservancy".

Report – Hutti Gold Mines, Karnataka

Text and photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar



Long-tailed Shrike

I had an opportunity to visit the Hutti Gold Mines Ltd (HGML), a company located in the state of Karnataka, which is engaged in the mining and production of gold, as part of my work. HGML was first established as Hyderabad Gold Mines in 1947. With the closing of Kolar Gold Fields in 2001, HGML is now the only

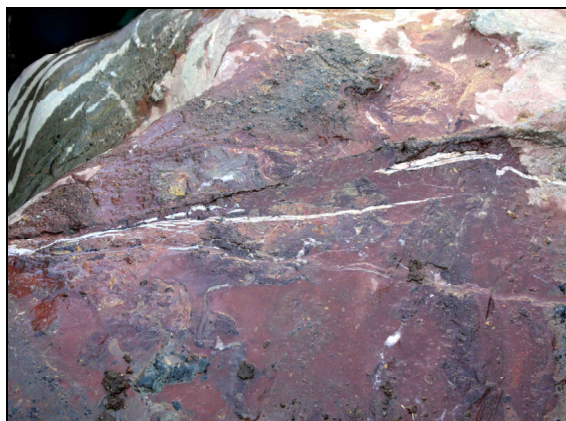
company in India which produces gold by mining and processing the gold ore. Owned by the Government of Karnataka, HGML has two plants located in Hutti and Chitradurga. HGML mines gold from its main gold mine located in Hutti and other satellite mines.



Disseminated Gold (L) and Gold Nuggets (R)

The mines used by HGML are mainly located in the Hutti-Muski precambrian greenstone geological belt which contains both readily extractable native gold and gold-bearing sulphides. These mines in total produce about 3 tonnes of gold a year. It has gold ore reserves of about 31.02 million tonnes which could last for about 60 years and yield about 150.4 tonnes of gold.

At Gogi area there is a fairly large deposit of Uranium Pitchblende in brecciated dolomite. The company, however, has not been able to exploit this, owing to local resistance stemming from the fear of radiation, although in reality, radiation starts only after the milling processes - Nature has its own safeguards! Once the mining activity starts, this would become one of the largest deposits in India.



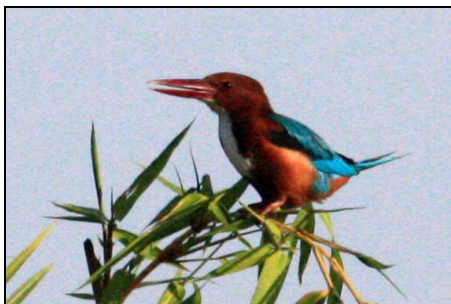
Brecciated dolomite host for Uranium Pitchblende (L) and Rare Earth Minerals (R)

At Mincheri there is an occurrence of Rare Earth Elements (REE), which has to be exploited due to the stoppage of exports from China and a resultant shortage in the world market.

LaLu elements in short - along with scandium and yttrium; most of these elements are radioactive.

As these Rare Earth Elements are mainly used in computer parts, it has become quite essential to locate and mine them. This includes elements starting from Lanthanum to Lutetium - called

Contrary to the general perception of mines being locations that cause immense damage to biodiversity, and hence being unsuitable for birds, the Hutti Gold Mines premises has a fairly large number of species that are seen quite regularly.



White-breasted Kingfisher



Purple Swamphen



Cattle Egret



Blyth's Reed Warbler



Black-headed Ibis



Laughing Dove



Brahminy Starling



Scaly-breasted Munia



Indian Grey Hornbill



Purple Heron

A list of birds that I have observed there, is given below:

S. No	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
2	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>
3	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
4	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>

5	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
6	Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
7	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
8	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
9	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
10	Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>
11	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>
12	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
13	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
14	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
15	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
16	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
17	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
18	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
19	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
20	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
21	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
22	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
23	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
24	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
25	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
26	Large Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
27	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
28	Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove)	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
29	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
30	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
31	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
32	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
33	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
34	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
35	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
36	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
37	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
38	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
39	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
40	Rosy Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>
41	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
42	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
43	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
44	Unid. Swallow	
45	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>

Variations in the breeding season of the Indian Courser

Humayun Taher, Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Sharada Annamaraju, M Lawrence

The Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) is a species of courser found in mainland South Asia, mainly in the plains bounded by the Ganges and Indus river system. Like other coursers, it is a ground bird that can be found in small groups as they forage for insects in dry open semi-desert country. The species occurs in dry stony, scrubby or rocky country (but rarely on sandy terrain) from the Indus valley east of Bangladesh and south to the tip of Peninsular India. Other areas where they are commonly seen include the Deccan plateau and the arid regions of north-western India in Rajasthan and Gujarat. It is resident in some areas but makes local movements.

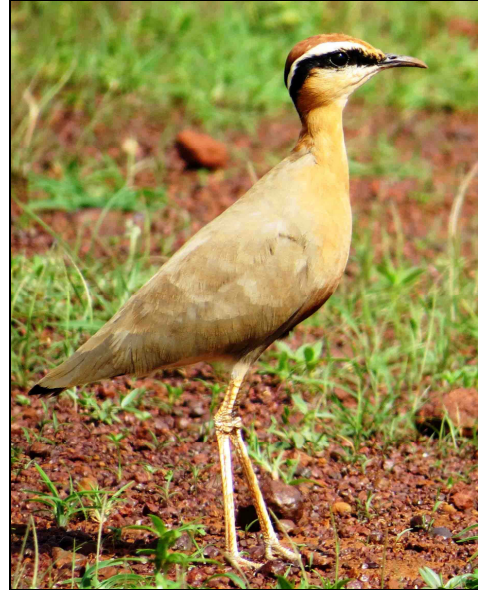
In January 2014, we saw a pair of Indian Coursers behaving in a manner which led us to suspect the presence of a nest. One bird was seen crouching on the ground in a manner very suggestive of incubation. However, as the birds were showing signs of uneasiness, we moved away and did not attempt any approach to verify the presence of a nest or eggs. Subsequently, this sighting remained recorded in the notebook, but we did not pursue the matter.



Indian Courser

Towards the end of January this year, we again saw a pair of Indian Coursers in a similar situation. However, this time the birds were accompanied by two small chicks (which did not appear to be more than a couple of days old, as they were still unsteady on their feet). Again, bearing in mind the vulnerability of the young birds, we refrained from close approach and moved away as soon as the adults started to show signs of uneasiness.

This time, we looked through the Handbook of the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent (Ali & Ripley, 1987) and found the breeding season mentioned as "...chiefly March to August. Some seasonal variation." Wikipedia mentions that "The birds breed mainly from March to August. Records exist for mid-May in southern India and Sri Lanka and mid-April in Darbhanga." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_courser).



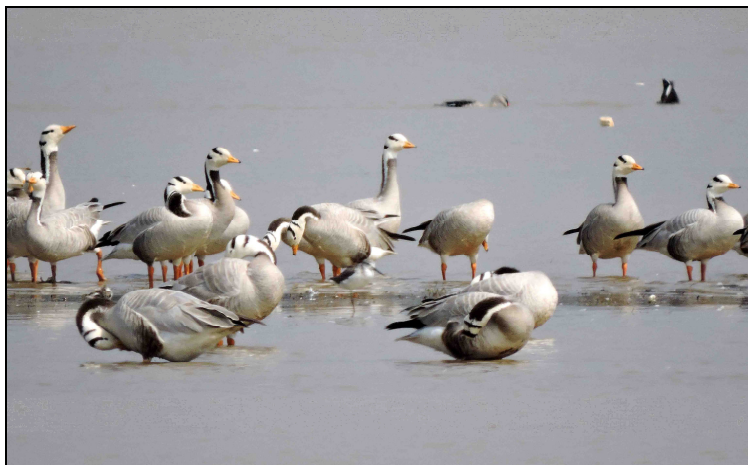
Indian Courser

It is interesting to note that both records of breeding (one possible and one confirmed sighting) from this part of the country seem to be much earlier than the given season. If we match the probable incubation of mid-January 2014 against the chicks seen this year, it seems quite possible that the bird was indeed actually incubating. We would be keen to learn if other members have noted possible breeding behaviour of the species and, if so, whether any dates are available. It is possible that the breeding season differs in the south, or it could be that availability of prey/suitable habitat may have influenced the birds to change their breeding season locally.

More information from members would be extremely interesting to us!

Report – Ringed Bar-headed goose at Osman Sagar

Text and photos: Y Prakash Rao



Bar-headed Goose flock

Bar-headed Geese have always fascinated the scientific and the birding community for the kind of journeys they undertake year after year under testing conditions and displaying extreme levels of endurance. These birds breed in mountain lakes in Central Asian countries and winter in India.

On 7th March 2015, one such flock consisting of about 450 members was found to be wintering in the Osman Sagar Lake on the south-western edge of Hyderabad. Among this flock was one goose with a green-coloured ring on the neck, with markings “F42”.



Ringed Bar-headed Goose F42 amidst the flock

On enquiring about the antecedents of the ringed goose, Mr. Nyambayar Batbayar, PhD, Director Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, confirmed that the bird was ringed on 15th July 2013 at Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake which is around 500 km west of Ulan Bator, the capital city of Mongolia. He also confirmed that this was the first report of a sighting since it was ringed.

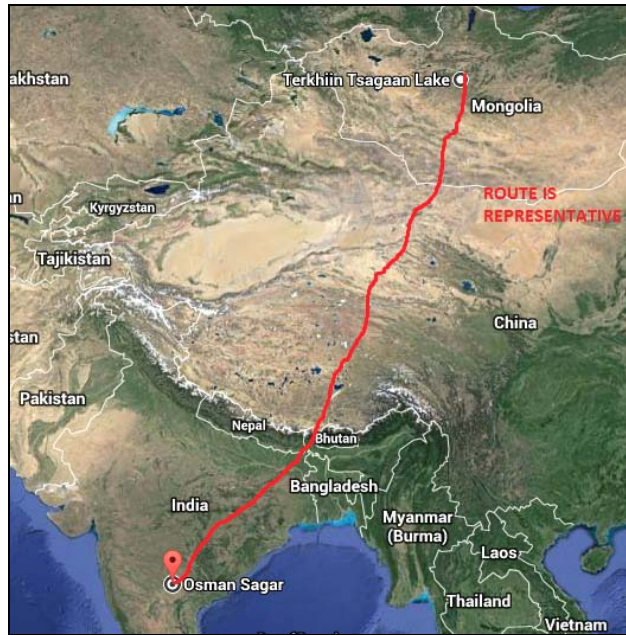
The coordinates of the start point and destination are as below.

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake	48 09 17 N 99 40 12E
Osman Sagar Lake	17 22 30 N 78 17 21 E

Since one degree change in latitude equals to 111 km on ground, the journey towards India as the crow flies, translates to 3930 km. However, since the goose does not fly as the crow does (and

literally so!), the actual distance travelled is much greater. This is due to the fact that the geese are continuously drifting due to winds and may have to alter course due to weather, terrain and logistical reasons. While the Great Circle route to Hyderabad lies to the west of the Mt Everest, actual observations have shown that they actually cross the Himalayas to the East between Bhutan and Nepal.

Lake Terkhiin Tsagaan is at an elevation of 6746 ft, which is a little higher than Darjeeling. Thus the birds are acclimatized to this altitude since they are born here. The average elevation of terrain during the south bound journey varies between 6000-10000 ft for the first 1000 km in Mongolia, going up to 16500 ft for the next 1000 km (Himalayan crossing) and thereafter, abruptly reducing to as low as sea level, depending on the destination of the flock.



Map of route taken by ringed Bar-headed Goose F42

The southward migration happens between October and December, while the north-bound journey takes place from March to May each year. Since this bird was ringed in 2013, we can safely assume that this bird would have completed one migration during 2013-14 post ringing.

I hope that more birds are sighted in future to help understand the migration patterns and help achieve the objectives framed by the scientific community.

Bird Humour

(contributed by JVD Moorty)



(From Times of India, date not available)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*)



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
(Thattakad, Kerala, 11-11-2014)

Order: Coraciiformes
Family: Meropidae
Genus: *Merops*
Species: *M. leschenaulti*
Size: 18-20 cm

Description & distribution: A near-passerine member of the bee-eater family Meropidae, the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, like its other 'cousins', is richly-coloured. A slender bird, it is predominantly green, with some blue towards the lower belly and rump. It has a chestnut forehead, crown, nape, mantle, ear coverts and a narrow throat band. The area between bill and throat band is pale yellow. It has black lores that continue as a band under the eyes and ear coverts. Below the throat band, after a narrow black and indistinct yellow strip, the underparts are greenish right up to the vent and under tail-coverts, where it is tipped with blue. The upperparts, including lower back, wing coverts, primaries, secondaries and tertiaries, are green. The central tail feathers of the otherwise green tail are bluish. Rump and upper tail-coverts are pale shining blue. The thin, curved bill is black, and the legs and feet are blue-grey. Eyes are red with a black eye-ring. Sexes are alike, but young birds are duller in colour, and the crown and mantle may show green or variable chestnut-brown. As compared to the other bee-eaters, one key difference is that the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater does not have the two elongated central tail feathers.

The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is distributed across the Indian sub-continent and nearby regions, across to South-east Asia, including Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Andaman sub-species, *M. l. andamanensis*, is slightly larger, and has black-to-

darkish-black bill, legs and claws. The irises are crimson. The Javan sub-species, *M. l. quinticolor*, on the other hand, has no chestnut throat band - it shows yellow from bill down to the black pectoral band, and the tail is blue.

Behaviour: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is a resident breeder across most of its range. It prefers edges or clearings in sub-tropical open woodland or light forest, often near water. It may also be seen in coastal scrub, along riversides, or even in large gardens and plantations. It is usually found singly or in small groups, though it may feed or roost in communal groups. The diet predominantly consists of bees, wasps, hornets, butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers and other insects, which the bird hawks from the air during aerial sorties from an open perch. They are also known to splash into water and pick up aquatic insects.

Courtship display is not particularly spectacular, but it includes raising of crown and throat feathers, spreading and quivering of tail, wing-raising and, occasionally, aerial displays. Vocalizations become louder, and courtship feeding may occur too.

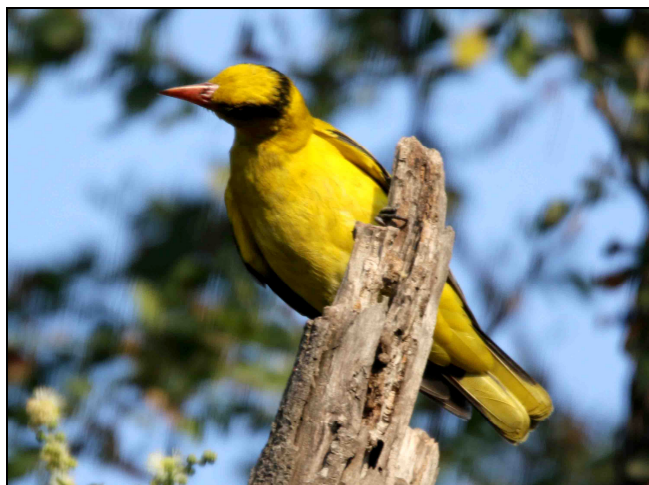
Nesting: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater breeds from February to June. It nests gregariously, forming nesting colonies in sand banks. The nest is a long tunnel into the sand bank, and the typical clutch consists of 5-6 spherical white eggs. Both parents participate in incubation duties.

Local name: The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is known as 'lal-sir patringa' in Hindi, 'kattalan kuruvi' or 'panchankam' in Tamil, and 'pithakanth patrango' in Gujarati.

Brief note – Sighting of the Black-naped Oriole at Nehru Zoological Park

Photos: G Ramakrishna Rao

Mr G Ramakrishna Rao reported the sighting of the Black-naped Oriole at the Nehru Zoological Park on 12th February 2015. This is an extremely interesting record, as earlier reports of the species from Hyderabad have been few and far between.



Black-naped Oriole (Photos: G Ramakrishna Rao)

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